

Remarks on Infrastructure Improvement Efforts in Baltimore, Maryland

January 30, 2023

Hello, hello, hello! Anytime I see a train door open, I head for it. *[Laughter]*

And by the way, I can say it now since I'm no—the—there's different leadership. I used to, about 15 percent of the time, ride with the engineers. *[Laughter]* For real. And I'm the only guy that I'm aware of, when I stopped riding Amtrak, that had a key to get in the back. *[Laughter]* So you can—you can tell your predecessor—he's gone—that. *[Laughter]*

Look, hello, Baltimore.

Is there any organized labor, any unions in the house? You're making it run, man.

Well, Brandon Scott, thank you for the passport into this great city. And, Governor Wes Moore, Lieutenant Governor Miller, I can't tell you how much I appreciate you being here, and you've—all the money you've committed to make this thing work as well.

And two of my best buddies in the United States Congress, I think—not—no hyperbole—the—two of the best United States Senators I've ever served with, and I served there for 36 years in the Senate: Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen. Ben and Chris, thank you, thank you, thank you.

And, Kweisi Mfume, I tell you what: When I get in real trouble, that's the guy I call. *[Laughter]* Oh, there you are, sitting right in front. You helped us get so much of this done, including the project we're here to celebrate. Thank you.

You know, look, thanks to the Members of the Maryland delegation and Congressman John Sarbanes—he and his dad and I talked a lot about Amtrak, spent a lot of time working on it.

Dutch, you're still here, aren't you? I saw Dutch—there you go. Hey, Dutch. Good to see you.

As well as Steny Hoyer. Probably one of the best leaders we've ever had. Steny, you're a hell of a guy. Where are you? For real.

I've kidded Steny for years. I've kidded Steny for years. He represents the western shore of Delaware. *[Laughter]* We call it the Delmarva Peninsula. We can get into it all that. At any rate, Steny, you're the best and one of the greatest champions the State has ever had. And an incredible minority—majority leader and continues to serve Maryland very well.

You know, I mean this sincerely: I don't think there's a better delegation in the entire United States of America than the American—than the delegation here in Maryland, including your State legislatures as well.

And somebody who I was senior to, but never referred to me as "Senator," would always say "Biden, come here"—Barbara Mikulski. I wish Barb were here. She did a lot to make this day happen as well, all the years we worked on this. Baltimore particularly, Amtrak specifically.

And finally, it's been over 3 years since—oh, I didn't know you had seats. Man, you ought to sit down. *[Laughter]* By the way, I said—when I was running for the—in 2020, for the job, I said, "Everybody take their seat," and there were no seats. And the press said, "He is really stupid." *[Laughter]* So I don't dare tell anybody to take a seat unless I see the chairs.

But anyway, thank you. You know, it's been over 3 years since his passing, but my late friend, Elijah Cummings—he's with us in the spirit and looking down and saying, "Joe, you finally got this sucker done."

And CEO Stephen Gardner. Stephen is—he knows he's got a strong supporter of Amtrak. Probably too strong. I'm driving him nuts already. I want to get it all done quickly.

And Secretary Pete Buttigieg. This is just one example of the great work you're doing, Pete. I appreciate it a lot.

Let me, at the outset—this is just the beginning—beginning—of having a 21st-century rail system that's been so long overdue in this country.

Back in Delaware, I'm known for riding Amtrak, for being their Senator all those years. And most of you know that a Senator—as a Senator, I rode the train between Washington and Wilmington, and back and forth, every single day that the Senate was in. And they tell me it was about an average 200—117 days a year, about 265 miles a day. I put over a million miles on Amtrak—not a joke—including as Vice—including as Vice President.

Amtrak wasn't just a way to get home to family. The conductors, the engineers—they literally became my family. I used to have a summer party at my home in Delaware. Started off with about 10 conductors and engineers, ended up with about 70 people. They might—became my friends. I went to an awful lot of their children's weddings and, unfortunately, funerals of their—of them.

When I was Vice President, I flew over a million miles on Air Force Two. And I was going home as the United States—as Vice President, and one of the conductors said to me: "Hey, Joe, big deal. A million whatever—two hundred—you've"—he said, "You've—you've traveled over a million miles on Amtrak." I said, "How the hell do you know that?" And they added up at their—but, folks, look, I made a thousand trips through this tunnel, so I've been through this tunnel a thousand times.

And you know, but when folks talk about how badly the Baltimore Tunnel needs an upgrade, you don't need me to tell you. I've been there, and you've been there too. I also know that it's not just Amtrak. I know how important this tunnel is to computer rail—commuter—computer rail—commuter rail and MARC rail back and forth to Washington.

And I know how much it matters to the entire Northeast Corridor from here to Boston. That—it matters—it matters a great deal.

For years, people talked about fixing this tunnel. Well, I think I may be one of the few guys—back in the early eighties, I actually walked into the tunnel with some of the construction workers. You ought to get inside and see it. This is a 150-year-old tunnel, and you wonder how in the hell it's still standing.

And with the bipartisan infrastructure law, they'll be finally getting it done.

The law—this law is the most significant investment in American roads and bridges since the Interstate Highway System, and it's the single most significant investment in rail in America since Amtrak was created 50 years ago.

And through the infrastructure law, we're going to be investing over \$4 billion to replace the existing Baltimore and Potomac Tunnel. And that's why it's so important. Over 2,200 trains run on this corridor every single day, and it's the busiest in the United States and one of the busiest corridors in the world.

A problem anywhere along the line means—up and down the East Coast—it means commuters are trying to get to and from work and they'll get in trouble, businesses trying to ship

their goods, travelers trying to visit family. If this line shuts down, in just 1 day, it would cost the country over \$100 million.

But this tunnel is a major checkpoint [chokepoint; White house correction] for 9 million Amtrak and MARC commuter [commuter; White House correction] rail passengers who pass through it each and every year. One point four million—excuse me—a 1.4 million—a 1.4-mile stretch with a tight curve so that trains have to slow to 30 miles an hour.

You probably all heard this already, but it's important. Ninety-nine percent of the weekdays, there's been a delay here somewhere. Trust me, I know.

This tunnel is nearly, as I said, 150 years old. This is Civil War era. Ulysses S. Grant was President. The structure is deteriorating, the roof is leaking, the floor is sinking. This is the United States of America, for God's sake. We know better than that. And we know we have to prove we're much better than that.

Funding from the infrastructure law is fully—will—fully replace this tunnel. And we're naming the new tunnel after Frederick Douglass, who boarded this train to freedom right here in Baltimore. You know, and it's especially—and he escaped slavery, he traveled the country by rail, fighting for abolition and civil rights.

So that it's fitting we honor him in this way—the Frederick Douglass—look, we have a lot to do. When the project is done, new trains will travel through this tunnel at 110 miles an hour instead of 30 miles an hour. MARC trains will go from here to Washington in 30 minutes.

On an average weekday, that will eliminate nearly 7 hours a day. The Frederick Douglass Tunnel will be all electric, and we'll continue to invest in rail to make it easier for people to use. It has potential to take thousands of vehicles—thousands of vehicles—off the highways, including the interstate, and save millions of barrels of oil, reducing pollution.

All the studies show, if you can get from point A to point B by rail faster than you can by automobile, you take the rail. This is going to be a game changer for the environment as well. And so this is what we're doing across the country, not just here.

Tomorrow I'll be in New York for a similar announcement, the Hudson Tunnel Project, and a critical junction on the Northeast Corridor. Earlier this month, I was in Kentucky with the Republican leader. And we're standing there—and Republican Governor and also Democratic leaders. Over a billion dollars is being spent on the Brent Spence Bridge over the Ohio River, connecting Ohio and Kentucky.

We're repairing the original bridge and building an entirely new one parallel to it. Each day, trucks carry about \$2 billion worth of freight across that bridge from Florida to Canada. And it was built 60 years ago. Folks have been talking about fixing it for decades, but now we're finally going to get it done.

And we're not stopping there. We're closing the digital divide.

Nearly 175,000 households in Maryland who haven't had access to high-speed internet are now getting access to it through the—this infrastructure law—bipartisan infrastructure law. And our broadband program is estimated to create 200,000 jobs across the country just putting it in the ground. And it's all union work.

And today—[applause]. And today we're announcing a nearly \$4 million grant to a great HBCU in Baltimore, Coppin State University, to buy new laptops and give students digital skills and training that they need to compete in today's workplace.

The Army Corps of Engineers spends a million—spends millions each year dredging to keep shipping channels clear at the Port of Baltimore and to help bring larger ships with more cargo in and out of Maryland.

Now we're investing another \$84 million from the infrastructure law to take the dredged material and restore the Mid-Bay Islands on the Chesapeake, a critical habitat for fish and shellfish and birds, and these islands are central to the fishing and tourist industry.

There's a lot we're going to get done. And one of the things about the infrastructure law I'm most excited about is, we're doing all this with workers and with products made in America with union labor. In fact, today we're announcing that this project will be built under a project labor agreement. These agreements are agreements that contractors and unions put in place before the construction begins.

They ensure major projects are handled by well-trained, highly skilled union workers. They resolve disputes ahead of time, ensuring safer work sites, avoiding disruptions and work stoppages that can cause expensive delays down the line. So they're not just good [for; White House correction] workers, they're good [for] taxpayers too.

Amtrak and the building trades have agreed that the project labor agreement will be in place not just here in Baltimore, but all across major rail construction projects up and down the Northeast Corridor.

And the Baltimore Tunnel Project will lead to 20,000—20,000—good-paying construction jobs: laborers, electricians, carpenters, cement masons, ironworkers, operating engineers, and so much more. These are good jobs you can raise a family on, and most don't require a college degree, but they do require the equivalent of a college degree. You have to have 4 to 5 years of an apprenticeship. That's one of the reasons they're the best trained workers in the world. The best in the world.

I'm not—I've been saying that my whole career, and it's true. These are jobs for folks I used to—think about as I took the train home at night going through the stretches of suburban Maryland and suburban Baltimore, and look out the window, see the flickering lights on people's tables. Not a joke.

I used to look and them and just wonder what their conversations were at their kitchen table, their dining room table, what were they thinking about before they put their—just before or after they put their kids to bed, asking questions that are ordinary and profound.

"Are we going to have—we going to have money—have enough money left over, honey, at the end of the month, after we pay our bills," just to have a little bit of breathing room? Is that—my dad used to say: "You know, Joey, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about respect." It's about being able to look your kid in the eye and say, "Honey, it's going to be"—I mean this sincerely—"It's going to be okay." And mean it.

Well, guess what? Folks, too many people have been left behind in the past or treated like they're invisible amid the economic upheaval of the past four decades. They remember. They remember the jobs that went away and wonder whether a path even exists anymore for them to succeed. But I know we can forge a path of building an economy where no one is left behind.

That's what this project and others like it across the country are all about. It's about making investments in America's cities, towns, heartlands in rural America. It's about making things here in America again. It's about good jobs. It's about the dignity of work. It's about respect and self-worth. And it's about damn time we're doing it.

We went through four decades where we exported jobs and imported product. We're exporting product and importing jobs now.

For too long, we've talked about asserting American leadership and building the best economy in the world. But we have the—to have the best economy in the world, you have to have the best infrastructure in the world—that's not hyperbole; it's a fact—to get products to market, to create thousands of good-paying jobs.

For most of the last century, we led the world by a significant margin because we invested in our people. We invested in ourselves. We invested in research and development.

But along the way, we stopped. We used to rank number one in the world in research and development. Now we rank number nine. China used to rank number eight. Now it ranks number two. The risk of losing our edge as a nation and China and the rest of the world catching up is real.

For decades, the backbone of America—the middle class—has been hollowed out. Too many good-paying manufacturing jobs moved overseas because labor was cheaper. Jobs moved overseas and factories closed down. Once-thriving cities and towns became shadows of themselves, what they used to be.

When Carrier—one of the biggest manufacturers in Syracuse, New York—stopped making air conditioners, they went—the town went into decline. Now, Micron's enormous investment of semiconductors in Syracuse is bringing it all back and more.

The same thing was happening in Lordstown, Ohio, when GM shut down their auto factory. But this past year, thanks to all we're doing with electric vehicles, GM and LG announced that they'll hire thousands of workers to build the new electric vehicle batteries.

And when these towns were hollowed out, something else was lost: their pride, their sense of self-esteem. Folks, these are the effects of the so-called trickle-down economics, the view from Park Avenue that says, "When you do—when the wealthy do well, it will all trickle down to everybody else." Not in the family I was raised in. It didn't work that way.

But there's another one that I hold—that hold—folks in Baltimore hold as well or folks in cities who were born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and grew up in Claymont, Delaware, like I did—they view the backbone of America—they are the backbone. They are the people who get up every morning and go to work just to bust their necks trying to make an honest living.

Look, folks, I've said it many times: Wall Street did not build this country. The middle class built this country. And unions built the middle class. That's a fact.

I ran for President to build an economy from the bottom up and the middle out, to bring back good-paying jobs you can raise a family on whether or not you went to college, to give working families a little more breathing room, to invest in ourselves again, to invest in America again. And that's what we've done.

My first 2 years in office, we had 2 of the strongest years of economic growth and job growth in American history. We've created 11 million new jobs, including 750,000 manufacturing jobs, and we're just getting started. Where in God's name is it written that America can't lead the world in manufacturing again? I don't know where that's written.

In addition, there's been major private investment totaling nearly \$300 billion in American manufacturing, including for semiconductors and small computer chips that power virtually everything in our lives from cell phones to automobiles to artificial intelligence.

You know, what a lot of people don't remember or don't know: We invented the computer chip in America. We invented it, and we made it more sophisticated.

Thirty years ago, America had more than 30 percent of global chip production, worth tens of billions of dollars. But today, we produce only around 10 percent of the world's chips. Instead of the supply chain for these chips starting with us, it starts with countries we can't rely on.

New automobiles need up to 3,000 of those chips just to be made. When overseas factories that make these chips shut down during a pandemic, automakers in America had to shut down their product lines too. We couldn't produce enough cars because we didn't have enough chips. We can't ever let that happen again.

That's why we came together to pass the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act, and we're seeing the results now. Just a few hours north of here, IBM invested \$20 billion in its facility in Poughkeepsie, New York, in semiconductor design and manufacturing, quantum computing, artificial intelligence.

Intel is investing \$20 billion building two chip factories—fabrication facilities just outside of Columbus, Ohio. A hundred billion with Micron in Syracuse. Forty billion with TSMC in Phoenix. Our economic agenda has ignited a boom in manufacturing, from semiconductors to electric vehicles to advanced batteries that are going to power those vehicles.

And in addition to that—anybody from the IBEW here?—500,000 charging stations you're going to build in America so you can go from coast to coast to coast.

Look, there's much more to say about what we're going to be doing to modernize American rail. But let me close with this, because if we don't get it by a quarter after, we're all here for the next 2 hours almost. *[Laughter]*

When America sees these projects popping up across the country, it sends a really important message: When we work together, there's not a damn thing we can't do. There's nothing beyond our capacity. We can move—we can move this. We can move this Nation forward.

And it sends another message as well: the message of pride. Pride in our country. Pride in what we can do when we do it together.

You've heard me say it, and I apologize for repeating. But I'm—as long as I'm here, I'm going to say it: That it has never been a good bet—never been a good bet to bet against America. Never. And I can honestly say, as I stand here today, I have never been more optimistic about America's future.

We just have to remember who in God's name we are. We're the United States of America. There is nothing—nothing, nothing, —beyond our capacity if we work together. We've never failed to meet an objective when we set our mind to it.

So it's about time we say, once again, we're going to lead the world the second quarter of the 21st century.

May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:44 p.m. at the Baltimore and Potomac Tunnel North Portal. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Brandon Scott of Baltimore, MD; Reps. Kweisi Mfume, C.A. "Dutch" Ruppersberger, and Steny H. Hoyer; former Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski; Senate Minority Leader A. Mitchell McConnell; and Gov. Mike DeWine of Ohio.

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